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HISTORY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA RAILROAD

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HISTORY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA RAILROAD,

BY

HON. RUFUS BARRINGER,  
OF CHARLOTTE.

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[Read before the Society at Chapel Hill, May 10, 1894.]

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## HISTORY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA RAILROAD.

BY GEN. R. BARRINGER

The building of an ordinary railroad is now no longer a matter of special interest to the public. Of late years, the achievements in that way have been on such a gigantic scale as almost to cease to attract attention. But the grant of the charter of the North Carolina Railroad in 1848-9 with two million of dollars of State aid, was a new departure amongst us, and was, in fact, the basis and the beginning of our entire present system of internal improvement, now reaching and intersecting every part of the State.

The Chair of History at the State University has therefore, done well to make the building of this great "Central" line, as it was long called, one of its subjects of historic research and study. I have myself, too, selected it as such, because I think the changes then set in motion, tend to explain better than anything else the previous lethargy of our people, and also the causes of the wonderful activity now seen and felt in all classes amongst us. I likewise select this subject, partly, because I was an actor in the vital legislative changes then effected, and I happen to know that some important errors prevail in regard to the real authors of that great measure. I was at that time a member of the "House of Commons," as it was then called, from the county of Cabarrus, and I

think I was well posted as to all matters so especially affecting the interests of my constituents.

The subject has certain inherent difficulties, which have never before, so far as I know, been discussed in the spirit of true historical criticism and analysis, and I approach it with some diffidence, because it involves times and occasions of much sectional, political and personal animosity and strife, which, for various reasons, our leading men have heretofore been reluctant to agitate. But the time has now fully come for impartial research for the truth, and I feel that the learned Professor of History at Chapel Hill will give credit for an honest attempt to solve the problem of the marvellous changes referred to on the simple deduction of logical results from the facts and figures I shall give. If I sometimes seem to speak in the critical tone of impatient progress, and to denounce somewhat strongly the "terrapin pace of our Old Rip Van Winkleism," I am sure Dr. Battle will understand that I mean nothing unkind to either the dead or the living; and that I started in public life, over fifty years ago, a "born Whig Reformer." My first public speech was in Gerrard Hall in 1841, on the "Iniquities of the English Opium Trade in China," an evil now threatening America as well.

### A HISTORICAL RETROSPECT.

To get at the poverty of the State in 1848, and to show the difficulties to be encountered and overcome by the friends of Internal Improve-

ment and general Reform, it is necessary to recur to the strange anomalies of the organic law under which we had lived in North Carolina for three-fourths of a century, and the endless sectional strife thus engendered. It will also then appear how these difficulties vanished, the moment a true American leader struck the cord of popular sentiment; and an honest conviction touched the North Carolina heart.

In 1790, North Carolina was the third State in the Union in population and wealth. By the census of 1840, she had declined to the relative place of the eleventh. Why was this? Is it possible to trace clearly the causes of this decline? I shall attempt to do so; and the present generation of our young people will be surprised to learn that the first sign of real Progress and Reform came from a bold Western statesman from the new State of Illinois, Judge Stephen A. Douglas, about 1847, then in this State in search of a wife. Singularly too, his visits here were followed the next year, 1848, by one of mercy from a renowned philanthropist, Miss Dorothea L. Dix, of Massachusetts, on the then seemingly hopeless mission of providing for the care and the cure of the insane.

I frankly admit that, apparently, these matters seem quite incongruous to the subject in hand, and yet I shall show that Judge Douglas and Miss Dix each helped to pave the way for the grant of the Charter for the North Carolina Railroad.

The entering wedge was when the "Little Giant of the West" told "Little Davy Reid" that the old English Constitution of 1776, under which our State of North Carolina lived, was a fraud on Popular Sovereignty, and "Little David" and the wily W. W. Holden horrified the old Hunker Democracy of East North Carolina, with the startling dogmas of "Free Suffrage, and Progress!"

The true connection of these remote and widely separated events can only be fully seen by the average voter of today, by recounting truly the history of the noted Constitution of 1776, and the evils it entailed. That instrument has been persistently lauded here in North Carolina as a Palladium of Liberty; and, in the main essentials of individual Right and Freedom, as also in its early recognition of both common education and advanced culture, it deserves all praise. But at the same time it laid restrictions on freedom of conscience; on the great right of suffrage, and especially on all just legislative representation, utterly inconsistent with the Bill of Rights preceding the Constitution itself, and wholly fatal to real free thought and wise public action.

#### THE CONSTITUTION OF 1776—HOW ADOPTED.

What was this Constitution? and what the special provisions complained of, and how came it to be adopted?

At the time the Provincial Convention met at Halifax in November,

1776, to organize the State government, and to frame a Constitution, blood had already been shed, and all parts of the Province were alive with effort to secure soldiers, to obtain arms and the munitions of war, and to equip and maintain troops. It was no time to frame organic laws, or to attempt to draft constitutions. In this emergency, it was very natural that the fathers should still look to England for the essential principles of Anglo Saxon freedom. Their quarrel was not so much with England and the English Constitution as it was with an unjust Parliament and a tyrant King. They, therefore, here in North Carolina, still took the English Constitution as their guide; but, with many of its best features, they unfortunately followed some of the worst. Among others it required a property qualification of £1,000 for the Governor, a land qualification for both the State Senators and the Commons: the former three hundred acres, and the latter one hundred, and a free-hold of fifty acres for every voter for the Senate. They also adopted a fixed rule for the numbers of both bodies—one Senator and two Commons from each county: with a Borough member from each of the towns of Edenton, Halifax, New Bern, Wilmington, Hillsboro and Salisbury: all without regard to size or population, and not providing for changes which must surely come.

Still further: They made no safe or practicable provision for amending the written Constitution

thus adopted, nor for correcting the possible evils sure to arise in its operation; but, manifestly, here again, simply following the unwritten English model, and leaving all to the General Assembly, so constituted—as Parliament is supreme in Great Britain. As most of the talent, wealth, population and culture then lay in the East, it gave that section a decided preponderance of influence and power, notably so to the small counties around Albemarle Sound. And this thing did so continue for over sixty years; while the large counties of the Middle and West increased rapidly in both numbers and wealth, and many Eastern counties not increasing at all except in slaves. Another strange provision was the singular religious test, forbidding Roman Catholics, Jews, and other non jurors from holding public office or trust! But the adoption of this test shows the intense bigotry with which all parties and creeds still clung to English supremacy, and Protestant away, as against Spanish and French Catholics, Infidels, and all non-believers. A quaint and heroic illustration of the noble patriotism of the times, is the fact of the old covenanter, Ben Patton, as early as 1774, walking all the way from Mecklenburg to the Provincial Congress at Newbern, to join hands with the High Churchman, John Harvey, in his sturdy struggle with Royal Power. But it should always be borne in mind that the colonies had just a few years before come out triumphantly from the war

that drove France from North America, and that with all her faults, at heart, "they loved old England still". It was also the heroism of Wolfe and the matchless statesmanship of Chatham that gave them enduring peace; and, with all danger now removed alike from French and Spanish and Indian, Independence was a special and distinct sentiment of very recent growth.

#### AFTER EFFECTS

The war over and Independence won, many minds instinctively turned to the Constitution and government under which they lived. They soon began to realize the drawbacks surrounding them; and a steady emigration started for the promising State of Frankland, and the "dark and bloody ground of Kentucky", where Sevier, Boone, Shelby, Henderson and others of North Carolina fame were planning to "win the West". Still North Carolina held her own, and at the date of the first census 1790, as stated, she was y<sup>et</sup> the third of the "Old Thirteen"; only Pennsylvania and Virginia outranking her. But now come other troubles.

#### THE FEDERAL UNION OF 1789—ITS EFFECTS THEN.

While the Union of 1789, was of countless benefits and blessings to the country at large, the wisest men in North Carolina readily saw its tendencies to centralized power; and they, at first, promptly declined to adopt the Federal Compact. They had already realized this in their State Constitution.

And now Willie Jones of the East and Joe McDowell of the West stood shoulder to shoulder in resisting the adoption of the National Constitution, until no less than eleven amendments, mainly suggested by North Carolina, had been practically assented to by the accepting States. But even these could not effectually guard against the dangers of implied construction; and now again the people of both the East and the West found their interests assailed in many ways not dreamed of before.

#### CLAS and SECTIONAL LEGISLATION.

From the very first, the whole system of Federal bounties, subsidies, drawbacks, and other so called protective measures by Congress, tended to antagonize and injure like interests here. At that time, say 1790, North Carolina was largely engaged in fishing and coast trade; her numerous sounds and rivers and affluent streams giving her superior advantages. So she had extensive foundries, many kinds of mills, tanneries, hatter and other shops, all sorts of handicrafts and other skilled industries; and so successful were they that she not only supplied her own domestic wants, but sent a large surplus to her less enterprising neighbors of Virginia and South Carolina. All at once these scattered and struggling industries were brought in sharp competition with those of the greater skill, and with the organized capital of the North and East; and ultimately all declined. True the whole South by clinging to simple agri-

culture and to slave labor may have committed gross error. But recent experience shows that no sort of agriculture, and not even combined free labor, can stand up against class power and patronage, once protected by law. And yet in this way North Carolina was doubly bound and cursed. And while she suffered along with the South in general from national legislation, certain census facts and figures show that other influences, peculiar to herself, unquestionably kept her under. Compare her with Georgia for instance. That State was also one of the "original thirteen." As tested by population from 1790 to 1840, North Carolina had not doubled a single time, while Georgia had nine times; and so with Tennessee and Kentucky, neither of them in existence as States in 1790, but both leading her in wealth and population in 1840.

Now the question is forced back upon us by these facts and figures. Why did North Carolina, with her superior climate and her attractive lands, as places for homes; with her unrivalled water power, and her endless variety of productions and industries, including valuable fruits, forests and minerals, alike in the Middle, the East and the West—why did she alone steadily decline?

#### STATE SECTIONAL STRIFE

All the facts show that, while hostile national legislation may have had some effect in producing this great decline, it is equally clear that other causes had the more

serious and lasting influence on the people. And an examination of the history of the State will disclose the fact that from 1776 to 1848, the Legislature was one continued scene of angry wrangle and strife between what was known as the East and the West. What was more disastrous, was the fact that the State had no overshadowing or controlling interests or high sentiment that would tend to allay the strife, or unite parties or people in any practical steps of Progress, or State Reform. This was fatal to true State pride and to all real development. More than this: its direct effect was to discourage in her leading men all thought or study of State issues, and to induce them to turn rather to the temptations of party patronage and the more attractive honors of National Politics. And here as a rule, they generally played a secondary role. In the long period of seventy-two years there were no leading State issues presented to the people of North Carolina. I do not of course include the Convention of 1835, because that was a body of only limited power or influence.

Let us now turn to the historical facts, and see what were the general subjects of debate and agitation in that eventful formative period from 1776 to 1848. They were almost invariably of a petty, narrow or local class, though occasionally important.

#### NEW COUNTIES.

One of the first and an ever recurring source of complaint and

annoyance was the erection of new counties. This was in truth, however, a most serious matter to those interested. Often the citizens had to travel hundreds of miles to attend to the most ordinary public and private duties; either to return, or to pay taxes, to settle estates, to secure a right, or to prevent a wrong, or even to guard the place. The average citizen of today has no conception of the extent of this grievance in 1776 and for sixty years following. Besides, it prevented the Middle and West from acquiring their due and proper influence in the legislature and in the government. They were steadily increasing in population and wealth, and yet the East persistently denied them relief, and they were helpless to demand either right or justice at the hands of a General Assembly, virtually controlled by a dozen eastern counties. It is painful now to recall the facts of the various artifices and devices resorted to in order to overcome obstacles and gain special objects. A favorite plan was to touch the pride of the East and play upon the vanity of some leading member of the legislature. As a result, we have in the Middle and West counties called after Eastern men of no special force or great repute. Among others the following counties were named in honor of living public men from the East, or from sections voting with the East, largely because of slave property: Burke, Caswell, Iredell, Cabarrus, Ashe, Moore, Person, Haywood,

Macon and Yancey; and after deceased Eastern men, are Buncombe, Davie, Gaston and Stanly.

#### SEAT OF GOVERNMENT—RIVER NAVIGATION.

For some years after 1776, the place of meeting for the general assembly was migratory; and annual disputes were had over New Bern, Smithfield, Fayetteville and Hillsboro, the West always claiming Hillsboro. But about 1795, this was settled by the removal to Raleigh. Then for long dreary years there was no new question of importance to break the monotony of small strife, until the West sought to open up its rivers, and build locks and dams to make them navigable. After the complete success of the Grand Erie Canal, there, for a time were a perfect rage in the Middle and West, headed chiefly by Judge A. D. Murphey. The East had no need for such works and so would do nothing. The leading men of that section, had early adopted the theory of a strict construction of the Federal Constitution on this subject, and now applied it to State improvement. Companies were organized for so improving the Catawba, Yadkin, Deep and Haw rivers, and much private capital spent and all ultimately lost, because the State would not aid.

#### EDUCATION AND RAILROADS.

Again the Middle and West called for better educational facilities, and here again the East opposed. Some did not care for education and others sent their children North or

abroad for culture. Then it was, about 1825-1826, that the West, in a body, regardless of creed, place or party, resolved to start a "Western College," and actually located the same at Lincolnton. This, too, failed, but remotely it led to Davidson College and other denominational colleges. A little later Dr. Joseph Caldwell, president of the University at Chapel Hill, wrote his famous "Carlton Letters," urging a State Railroad from Beaufort harbor in the East, right through the State to the mountains of the West. Even here the East refused to move, and the scheme came to naught. Though, later the Middle and the East themselves used the credit of the State to build the Raleigh and Gaston, the Wilmington and Weldon (or Raleigh) and the Weldon and Petersburg roads, all practically leading out of the State.

#### THE CONVENTION OF 1835.

But during all this time, the one irritating, all pressing question of the West was a regular demand, made year after year, for the legislature to call a convention to revise and amend the State Constitution. No argument, no appeal could reach the small oligarchy that controlled that body. At last an event occurred in 1834 that brought the whole subject of a revision of the organic law most forcibly before the public. In that year, there was a vacancy in the Supreme Court of the State. According to custom, the middle East was entitled to the man; and he was

found at Newbern in the Hon William Gaston, the lawyer of highest repute and of most culture in the State. He was, besides, personally very popular all over North Carolina, and of some reputation as a debater in Congress just after the war of 1812, which brought compliments from Henry Clay and others. But William Gaston was an avowed Roman Catholic. Despite this he was elected; and, as there were now strong doubts as to the exact meaning of the famous thirty-second article of the State Constitution, and Gaston himself thought he was not excluded, the sentiment was universal in favor of his acceptance. He did so; and took the usual oath of office. This, as never before, subjected the Constitution of 1776 to popular criticism. The Legislature yielded; and a Convention was called, and met in 1835; but with only limited powers to make certain specified amendments. These embraced substantially the abrogation of the offensive thirty-second article, and a change in the basis of representation in both Houses; and a modification of the property qualification in certain particulars; but leaving untouched that of fifty acres of land for the State Senate.

Such was the convention of 1835. Its work was only half done; and what was done served only to stimulate further inquiry into the true causes of popular discontent and the general depression. England had already passed her great Reform Bill three years before; and

the general agitation went on here. But soon two other events followed each other in quick succession, and with such startling results, as for the time, to override all else. These were the

#### WILD SPECULATIONS OF 1836 AND THE PANIC OF 1837.

The overthrow by Gen. Jackson of the "United States Bank", and the rapid growth of the "Pet State Banks" soon flooded the country with a "redundant depreciated currency". Everybody now ran fairly wild with speculation, especially in public lands. Then came the inevitable "Panic of 1837"—exceeding anything ever seen in the United States before or since.

So great was the re-action that it swept the old Hickory-VanBuren Democracy from power in the "Log Cabin, Coon Skin, Hard Cider," campaign of 1840, and landed in the white house "Old Tip and Tyler too." The death of Harrison in less than a month, gave the whole country the "Tyler Grip" for well nigh full four years: and no people suffered like North Carolina during those troublous times. In the flush days of 1835 and 1836, many of the more enterprising slave holders moved to the rich cotton lands of Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, while thousands of the hardy, self-reliant and spirited non-slave holders rushed to the inviting Northwest. It was then that Caleb B. Smith, a member of Congress from Indiana, told a member of Congress from North Carolina, that fully one-

third of his constituents were North Carolinians, or of North Carolina descent

#### THE DROUGHT OF 1845 AND A CHARLOTTE RAILROAD

As if all this was not enough to depopulate and exhaust the distracted and divided old State, in 1845 occurred the most fearful drought ever experienced through the Piedmont region. It was so marked in its effects as to somewhat prepare the public all over the State for a fair discussion of our sectional differences, and also the absolute necessity of some system of railroad connection between the East and the West. In the winter of 1845-'46 corn rose in many parts of West North Carolina from fifty cents to one dollar and a half a bushel. Much stock perished for want of food, and hardly could bread or meat be had at any price. At the same time, all through the East, corn was rotting in the field, and fish was used to manure land.

About this same time, during these scarce years of 1845-'46, the leading men of Charlotte began to agitate a connection with the railroad system of South Carolina, then approaching this section through both Camden and Columbia. Steps were taken for a convention to organize a company for that purpose, and this was done in the summer of 1847, ultimately selecting Columbia as the point.

Also Richmond, Va. was extending her railroad system so as to reach our border counties on the North.

## THE RIP VAN WINKLE OF THE SOUTH

But in all this, there was no hope for the redemption of North Carolina herself. There was no railroad west of Raleigh. All the roads east of Raleigh had become embarrassed and seemed to have no future. The amended<sup>4</sup> Constitution of 1835 had not operated to quiet agitation, or to inspire hope. On the contrary, the very able debates of 1834-5 had rather tended to increase the discontent by fully exposing the inequalities of our whole State government. It was not a free and equal government in the American sense. The State was lagard in every thing. An eminent South Carolina Senator had openly twitted her as the "Rip Van Winkle of the South," and her devoted Gaston had written "The Old North State Forever," virtually admitting the justice of the taunt.

## 1848—FREE SUFFRAGE—A STATE CAMPAIGN.

This year, 1848, was an epoch in the Nineteenth Century. On February 22nd, 1848, a small outbreak at a banquet in Paris had brought on a conflict that made France a Republic, and shook half the thrones of Europe. The Mexican war had made new issues in America, and the whole civilized world seemed to awake to the mighty impulses of the age. But here in North Carolina an artful politician was laying his plans to draw his people from the whirlpool of national politics, and plunge them into one of local sectional strife, so much dreaded by

all classes of citizens; and he stirred up an agitation wonderful in its results.

In 1844, James Knox Polk had beaten Henry Clay and so restored the Democracy to Federal power. But North Carolina remained true to the Whigs, and in 1847 Gov. Wm. A. Graham had carried the State against James B. Shepard an Eastern man, by a largely increased majority. Prospects looked so bad for the Democrats that no one dared to make a canvass that was attended with so much personal labor and exposure; such as had already caused the death of two of their best leaders—one of them in 1844, the lamented Michael Hoke, in the very prime of life. In this emergency the Hon. David S. Reid, an humble member of Congress from the Rockingham District, appeared in the field on a distinctly new State issue, dubbed, "Free Suffrage:" and which, it was charged at the time, the Editor of the famous Democratic organ in Raleigh, the North Carolina Standard, had managed to get into the party platform, much against the wishes of the party leaders. Nor is it clear how the Hon. Mr. Reid came to adopt such a side-issue, in a great national campaign, as that then pending, with a united party, and an acceptable candidate—Gen. Cass, at its head. But certain it is, that it proved a master stroke of bold political wisdom, and soon changed the party character of the State—finally made Reid Governor

and then United States Senator, and gave the State permanently to the Democracy. As a matter of fact, owing to the local sectional troubles between the East and the West, the leaders of both parties had long sought to avoid State issues, and trust rather to National topics for popular discussion. But the story is, that after the great "Popular Sovereignty Leader," Judge Douglas, began paying attention to Miss Martin, of Rockingham, N C, and making occasional visits here, he was amazed to find so much of both Old England and New England "fogyism" still pervading our organic law, and that he singled out the "fifty acre qualification" for voters for the Senate, as a text on which a proper leader could carry all before him. His kinsman and friend adopted exactly this course. Reid was not a popular orator; the Whig candidate, Charles Manly, was very sprightly and attractive; and at first seemed to carry all before him. He ridiculed the "hobby," and he often was cheered alike by Eastern Democrats and Whigs, many of whom still clung with tenacity to the work of the Fathers of 1776. But when the votes were counted out on the first Thursday in August, as was then the law in State elections, the Whig majority had fallen from many thousand to a few hundred. In the next race for Governor, 1850, the same candidates were nominated, and again made the canvass. But Manly now changed his tone, treated the questions seriously, and

even tried to go further than the "Radical David." He advocated the election of Magistrates, Judges, and all State officials by the people. But the latter saw the dodge, and stuck to Reid. And so Reid and "Free Suffrage" triumphed together. The constitution was changed by Legislative enactment," and at the ballot box, at least, all white men stood equal before the law.

#### LIGHT BREAKING—MISS DIX AND HER MISSION

In all the canvass of 1848 and in all the discussions of that memorable year, here in North Carolina scarcely anything was said about schemes of internal improvement; and least of all, about a great Central Railroad. The Whigs honestly wanted something of the kind; but they were half hearted, and feared party loss. The Democrats, as a rule, did not favor State aid, and hated all talk about "State Reform." And as the Historian Moore, himself an Eastern Democrat, well puts it: They said, "If the West want Railroads, let them build them themselves."

But the moment men got to thinking, and were allowed free debate, the scales fell from their eyes. And then the true leaders began to see the long night of "Rip-Van-Winkleism," already illumined with the hope of a coming dawn. But as yet no one man had spoken out, and there was no plan of action. On the contrary, the appearances were all exceedingly unfavorable to any concerted plan of action.

But during the Fall of 1848 Miss Dorothea L. Dix came South on her wonderful work in behalf of the Insane. There was then no Railroad in all the rich Piedmont section, West of the line extending from Richmond, Virginia, to Augusta, Georgia, and she had to make her way in lumbering stage coaches as best she could from point to point and then from county to county in hired vehicles, over rough dirt roads, in order to examine the jails and poor houses, where the destitute insane were then kept. Her object, of course, was to get plain facts, and so lay the truth before the several legislatures. She was here in Charlotte at one of our fall courts, when John W. Ellis, the young Democratic leader from Rowan, myself and other members-elect to the General Assembly called on her. She received like attentions all through the State, and when she finally reached Raleigh, and began to give out the facts, good people were simply horrified at the report she stood prepared to make. The helpless beings were not only often confined, on slight charges, and frequently loaded with clanking chains, all on the idea then commonly prevailing here, of there being no other practicable mode of treatment; but the jails and poor-houses themselves were horrid to look upon--almost invariably filled with filth and stench, and the occupants often indiscriminately crowded together.

This was with Miss Dix no mere sentiment, and she seemed to de-

spise affectation in any call to high Christian duty. Every thought was based on sound sense and direct business methods. Her name was already world wide--her fame rivaling that of Howard and Romilly. She touched incidentally, and without the least offense, the general backwardness of the State, a State at once so desirable to live in, and so in need of development. The papers had little to say, but intelligent men and women of all classes and all sections saw a crisis was upon us. If the work of Progress and Reform was once entered upon, there was no limit to the demands upon the cash and credit of the State, not then what it now is, nor what it soon became under the impulse of the bold legislation of the memorable session then near at hand. Still there was no intimation of any given line of movement, or even a chance of departure from the traditional "dodging-do-nothing policy." Worse still, there was no money in the treasury, and the treasurer's report then showed the whole State revenue for general purposes was only the pitiful sum of of \$96,000; a less sum by half than Charlotte and Mecklenburg county now annually collect and pay out. But here was this heroic woman asking, at one swoop, fully \$100,000!

And now to the battle.

THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION OF 1848-'9.

The two Houses met November 20th, 1848. Party feeling ran high. Taylor had been elected President,

and Manly had carried the State; but the latter by so small a majority as to point to the ultimate triumph of "Little David" and the "Free Suffrage Democracy", if only the party harness could be kept in order, and well in place. But here again was a singular coincident: Each house was just evenly tied; and each had several contested seats; and the famous one of Waddell against Berry, from Orange, actually extending through six weeks. What chance for Railroads and Lunatic Asylums in such a body!

After a few days' balloting the Whigs got the Commons, with the generous, conciliating Robert B. Gilliam, of the strong slave county of Granville, for Speaker; and the Democrats secured the Senate, with the unyielding, unfaltering, ever reliable Calvin Graves from the no less negro county of Caswell, as their Speaker and leader.

Gov. Wm. A. Graham was the retiring Executive, and in his last message, he gave account of the deplorable condition of both the State and the people. He frankly admitted that "the transportation facilities were the worst of any State in the Union." The Raleigh and Gaston Railroad had utterly broken down, and was near a stand-still; the Wilmington and Weldon was threatened with default; and the State in the lurch for both! He cordially commended Miss Dix and her mission to the earnest consideration of the members; but even he

could not yet recommend State aid.

Still Gov. Graham did advise a sort of prospective line of railroad from Raleigh to Salisbury, and then to be extended on to Charlotte, and ultimately connect with the road approaching that point from Charleston and Columbia. For this proposed line he advised a limited State aid, but it was mainly to serve and save the dilapidated Raleigh and Gaston line, and so protect the State from expected loss. And it was pointedly objected that the first and immediate effect of such a line would only be to build up towns and cities out of the State, with a mere chance of an Eastern extension, thereafter, as suggested by the Governor. William A. Graham, however, was the one man that then and at all times represented the best conservative progress of the State; and if this was all he and his followers had to offer, the prospects were gloomy enough.

#### THE 'DANVILLE CONNECTION:' A LION IN THE WAY.

But it also speedily turned out that, in anticipation of the City of Richmond extending one of its numerous railroad lines on to Danville, upon our Northern border, the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad Company would carry their Road right on through the State; and would do this without a dollar of public money—State or County. They asked only a "naked charter." Then, what made matters doubly complicated was the fact that

every member along this proposed "Danville Connection" from Mecklenburg to Rockingham, stood prepared to fight to the very end for this "Naked Charter."

Mr Ellis, of Rowan, had charge of the bill, and the same was introduced the very day after the organization of the Assembly.

The most determined, ever ready, outspoken opponent of the "Danville Connection" was the Hon. Edward Stanly, member of the House from the county of Beaufort, in the extreme East. He was an ex-member of Congress--of some repute, and easily led the Whigs. He was an intense partisan, but was always a generous foe. He indulged in no demagogism; did not make set speeches; rarely published one, and never "spoke for Buncombe." His position was a peculiar one. No railroad talked of or contemplated was likely to reach his home of "Little Washington;" nor did he have any scheme of his own to embarrass him. He therefore stood forth as a bold and really honest advocate for any really good North Carolina system that would likely build up our own State. This attitude gave great weight to all he said. He boldly avowed his purpose to fight, in every conceivable way, what he called the "Danville Sale." "But," he would often say, "the friends of this South Carolina and Virginia bondage were not to blame, so long as the North Carolina Assembly failed to give her people a real North Carolina system." "This

failing," he said, "I, too, go for Danville."

Meantime, a bill embodying Gov. Graham's plan had been introduced, but had no strength. And yet all agreed "that something must be done," and there was a general demand for an advance movement all along the line of modern progress.

In the midst of all this doubt and despondency, the Hon. James O. Dobbin, of Cumberland, the leader of the Liberal Democracy, appeared in the House from the death-bed of his wife, and in the spirit of her last request made the speech of the session in favor of a State Asylum. President Swain too had come down from Chapel Hill, and asked in the name of the young men of the State some hope of progress. Miss Dix herself consented to appear before the House. She entered, leaning on the arm of the President of the noble State University, then just rallying from a painful struggle of over fifty years. All this was more than even the "Hard Shell Democrats" could stand. The Dix Bill passed by 101 to 10 in the House.

This measure, of course, had no connection with Railroads, and yet the friends of the railroad all breathed freer. At last, one advance step had been taken, and at last, a breach had been made in the solid, serried ranks of an Old Fogey, State Sectionalism, and a narrow-mis-called Jeffersonian Democracy. Miss Dix alludes to this in letters at the time.

Immediately every body went to work to get up bills for some new measure; Short Line Railroads, Canals, Turnpikes, water-ways, Plank Roads, Law Reforms, Rights of Married Women, and hundreds of other bills poured in. But no one dared to tackle a regular Railroad System, requiring millions of State money. At last the Hon. W. S. Ashe, the Democratic Senator from New Hanover, later a member of Congress, and in after years President of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, was urged to formulate a plan.

Mr. Ashe came from a town that that did not have faith in Beaufort Harbor. Her keen-witted W. B. Meares had hit a commercial snag long before, when he said, "It storms at Beaufort 365 days in the year" Mr Ashe's bill was a plain business scheme. It proposed the beginning of a sort of North Carolina system. This called for two millions of State money to build a railroad from Charlotte to Goldsboro, two hundred and twenty-five miles, provided one million of stock was otherwise taken. It left out for the present the Raleigh and Gaston relief idea; and all "Buncombe" about both Beaufort Harbor and the Duck Town copper mines of Cherokee. This, of course, tended at first to weaken the bill; but the wisest men easily saw that the line was a good one; that it would gain strength on its own merit; and more, by not at tempting too much.

Still no one attempted to lead off for the Ashe bill. So, at last, the friends of the "Danville Connec-

tion" resolved to renew the fight for their "naked charter." But Mr. Ellis, who had charge of the "Danville Bill," had been made a Judge, and things were all at sea and our councils much divided. On the fifteenth of January, 1849, we got our Danville Bill up; and Mr. Stanly, as usual, was baffling every effort to get a vote. I chanced to get the floor, and resolved to hold it till a vote was reached in some form. Mr. Stanly interfered with his regular taunts about selling out to Virginia and South Carolina, and referred to Richmond as only a "Great Slave Mart," and to Charleston as "surviving solely on past pretentions." This I resented and defied him to make us an offer of any Bill providing for a general North Carolina System, likely to pass, and with sufficient State aid to secure its completion, and I, for one, would vote for it; and that I believed a large majority of my "Danville" comrades would do the same. This was received with some applause by the main body of my "Danville" friends. But the Mecklenburg and Rockingham members loudly protested. I now felt bold to repeat the pledge of the Danville Charter people to any fair and feasible North Carolina System. This was answered by applause from all parts of the House, Mr. Stanly then sprang to his feet and, holding up the Ashe bill, said he would pledge himself and his Eastern friends to that bill, if I would do the same. I assented, and Mr. Stanly was about to pre-

sent the Ashe bill to the House, when a question arose as to its probable place on the calendar. The session was now nearly two months gone, and there was danger in delay. Therefore Mr Williams, of New Hanover, suggested that the "Danville Bill" be laid upon the table, to enable some one to take up the Gov. Graham scheme; also known as the "North Carolina Railroad Bill", and which was well up on the calendar. This was all done; and I, still holding the floor, the Journal shows—page 672—that "Mr. Barringer moved to strike out all after the enacting clause and to insert in lieu thereof a substitute." This substitute was the "Ashe Bill". The next day Mr. H. O. Jones, Sr., who had now arrived, as the successor of Judge Ellis, from Rowan, moved to insert in the Ashe bill the several sections of the Graham bill to revive the Raleigh & Gaston road; and Mr. Wadsworth, of Craven, moved to insert like provisions for opening the Neuse river from Goldsboro to New Bern. So the North Carolina Railroad bill, thus amended, came up on its second reading and was rejected by a vote of forty-nine to fifty-six. But to those familiar with the actual feeling of the House, the result was not discouraging. The usual motion was made to reconsider, and on the 17th it passed its second reading—sixty to forty-nine! Now came another scramble for amendments, some to make the bill more acceptable in certain particulars, others to get in local improvements for which

particular members were now anxious; and still others, to so load it down with State aid as to defeat it either here or in the Senate. These were generally voted down, and thus lost us a few weak supporters. And finally the third reading was set for the 18th, when it passed—sixty to fifty-two; the Mecklenburg and Rockingham delegates still voting solid against it; D. W. Courts and T. W. Keen from the latter, and N. J. Harrison, J. N. Davis and J. J. Williams from Mecklenburg.

#### THE BILL IN THE SENATE A TIE—SPEAKER GRAVES.

The chances in the Senate were all in doubt. That body was Democratic; and up to this time, no special effort had been made to draw the old ship from its Jeffersonian moorings. And such men as Henry W. Cannon, John H. Drake, A. B. Hawkins, John Berry, George Bower, W. D. Bethel, George W. Thompson, and John Walker were hard to lead and could not be driven. And above them all sat Speaker Calvin Graves, a recognized force from a county just under the nose of Danville, and devoted to Richmond. The speaker was tall, angular, and singularly ugly in feature: but his character was high; he was strictly impartial, and with all courtesy in bearing. From first to last no one could divine a leaning either way. But now a mighty effort was made to teach these born men of the plow and of the people a new tenet of Republican faith, a

to what the State owed the public. Judge Romulus M. Sanders and W. W. Holden both stepped forward and made strong appeals for the new departure. But all to no purpose. And then some of the Waigs, left out by the Ashe Bill, stood aloof. From these and other causes, it was seen from day to day, that in all the preliminary skirmishes, as also in the final struggle, the result would be very close, and that all might hang on the "Baptist Enigma," Calvin Graves.

By consent, the first and second readings were chiefly formal, to get the measure in shape, and to secure all sides and parties a just showing. This was after the old style, quiet, North Carolina way, when, as a hundred years before, Dissenters and Churchmen were alike honoring King, Queen and Royal Governor by naming towns, counties and mountain peaks after them, but at the same time, solemnly resolved to hurl them instantly from power "if they did not do exactly the fair thing." So, here, every courtesy was shown opposing parties and interests until January 25th, when the bill came regularly up, after full debate, and was put on its third and final reading. The Senate chamber was packed with visitors and strangers from all quarters to see the fate of the momentous struggle, now so full of weal or woe to the dear "Old North State," and which might settle here once for all the mighty effort to awake North Carolina from the long sleep of her death-like

"Rip-Van-Winkleism."

Speaker Graves calmly announced: "The Bill to charter the North Carolina Railroad Company and for other purposes is now upon its third reading. Is the Senate ready for the question?" Feeble responses said, "Question." The roll call began; and as feared, nearly every Democrat voted "No." The tally was kept by hundreds, and when the clerk announced twenty-two yeas and twenty-two nays, there was an awful silence. The slender form of Speaker Graves stood up, and leaning slightly forward, with gavel in hand, he said: "The vote on the Bill being equal, 22 yeas and 22 nays, the Chair votes Yea. The Bill has passed its third and last reading."

I have seen and read of many memorable and famous contests, and have witnessed many out-breaks of popular applause; but never anything like that then following. Even the granite Capitol seemed to shake for joy. But this was not all. There was then no electric telegraph in North Carolina; no express lines; no mail delivery; but immediately, every man and woman, every boy and girl, became a sort of message bearer. News was hastened in every possible way to every nook and corner of the Old Commonwealth, and the one phrase was: "Speaker Graves has saved the State—the Railroad bill has passed."

AFTER CONTESTS AND INCIDENTS.

Here really ends the "Historic Struggle" for the North Carolina

Railroad. All subsequent events were mere incidents in the development of a modern transportation system. And some of these were: The peculiar canvass for raising the million of private stock; the efforts to repeal the charter at the next session of 1850-1; the grant of another million of State aid; the spread of the spirit for improvement all over the State; the extensions both East and West; the renewal of the application for a charter for the "Danville Connection;" its refusal in 1858, and its grant and building 1861-4; the effect of the Richmond and Danville System; and the Lease to that System - these were all important features, and invoked sharp contests. But they are all commonplace, compared with the long sectional struggle that kept North Carolina poor and purseless for nearly three-fourths of a century, and then suddenly came to an end in the Historic Epoch of 1848, by the grant of the Charter of the "Great North Carolina Railroad", and which has had the effect of making us one people, and started us, at last, on the sure ground of Industrial Progress and Commercial Success. The extension of the lease of our great central line may now be an open question, to stand on its own merits. But its clear effect, originally, was to give North Carolina a leading North and South through line; and now we have no less than four North and South through lines; and virtually three East and West lines, making a real network of roads; and

reaching almost every corner of the State. In my judgment, the beginning of all this wonderful life and activity had its hope and start in the singular, striking "Free Suffrage Campaign" of 1848; but it would all have been lost, and probably for years to come, had it not been for the high patriotism, for the wonderful force of character of that plain North Carolina gentleman and Christian statesman, Calvin Graves, of Caswell. I happen to know that Mr. Graves was appealed to on every side to follow Party tradition, even to resenting the personal hits of Mr. Stanly, always at heart an anti-slavery man. But Mr. Graves stood nobly for Duty.

#### ERRORS AND CORRECTIONS.

I might here close; but I find many popular errors afloat in regard to this great North Carolina work, and I think that most of them can be traced to loosely-written North Carolina History. In Moore's North Carolina School History, page 206, it is stated that in 1848—"Ex-Governor Morehead and others besought the Legislature for State aid in a great line from Charlotte to Goldsboro—two hundred and forty miles long." And Cameron, in his North Carolina Handbook, page 284, confounds the North Carolina Railroad with the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, and speaks of the former as "undertaken in 1853." Now the truth is that in 1848, Gov. Morehead was, body and soul, for the Danville Connection. Nor did he ever give up his first love for that

line, and as late as 1858 was elected to the Legislature mainly to secure the Danville Charter.

The speech of his life was made in reply to W. T. Dortch and others, who still clung to the old-time sectional prejudices. The charter was refused, but the war soon opened the eyes of Mr. Dortch and his friends.

But it is also true that, in due time, when it was feared that the million of private stock might not be raised, and so save the charter, Gov. Morehead came forward as the one man to rally the masses to the work. He did it, and was made the first President of the company. Then he also went to work to build the Eastern Extension to Beaufort Harbor; for long years a sad failure, but of late even "the Mullet Road" begins to pay. Such is the remarkable effect of this "Great Backbone," the North Carolina Railroad, in bringing together all the diverse and diversified interests of our thriving North Carolina population.

#### SOME REMINISCENCES AND A PREDICTION.

At once, after the charter was granted, the people took hope. They organized companies to begin the numerous works provided for by the legislature, as opening up rivers, digging canals, building turnpikes, plank roads, &c., &c. Emigration from the State was measurably stopped, and a large body of small slave-holders—our most enterprising class—soon sprang up in all parts of the State. Better still, the mechanic arts were once more revived under the ad valorem Walker

tariff of 1846. An old uncle of mine had about a dozen slaves, and nearly all were trained mechanics, choice cooks, etc. But with all this there was as yet no surplus money in North Carolina, nor was there any such device as a "Construction Company" in those primitive times in North Carolina. Up to January 1, 1850, the million of private stock had not been secured, and there was talk of "repeat" as a campaign cry in the coming election. Certain liberal gentlemen agreed to assume the remaining stock, and called a meeting for organization at Salisbury July 11, 1850, and trust to the immense assembly then gathered to relieve them. Morehead and many other eloquent speakers were heard. But all without real effect. At last, old Mr. William Boylan, of Raleigh mounted the stand and said: "This morning I happened to recall that when I was a boy, the 'spelling books' and 'Geographies' all said that the main staples of North Carolina were 'tar, pitch and turpentine,'" and I asked to see one of the new books to find if there was any change. They brought it to me, and there were the same old pictures! My friends, I want to see this changed; and that, too, before this feeble frame goes to its grave. Do you say so? Shall it be done?" This brought the stock. As instance of noble response, Dr. John Fink, of Concord, worth probably \$4,000, took stock for \$8,000, and made it good; two maiden ladies of Cabarrus, Betsey and Katy Burns, worth probably

\$2,000 each, took \$1,000 each. And thus the stock was at last taken; the company was then organized; the surveys were duly made; the line was laid out into four main divisions; and it was arranged to work on all at the same time. Then on July 11th 1851, the ceremony of "breaking ground" was performed at Greensboro by Speaker Calvin Graves, in the presence of an immense assemblage. It was then agreed that the entire work should be completed, Jan. 1st 1856. This would have been done, but for the scourge of Yellow Fever at Norfolk, preventing the delivery of the iron. But the last spike was driven Jan. 29th 1856; and on Jan. 30th 1856, the first train of cars ran through the whole length from Goldsboro to Charlotte, 223 miles, making about eight years after the charter was granted.

To be sure this was slow work, compared to later trans-continental achievements. But the results have

been simply marvellous. Could the spirit of my excellent friend Billy Boylan now return to his native State, he would see on the trade list of the day a greater variety of articles from North Carolina than from any other State in the Union, and he would find here more mills and factories than in any other Southern State. And he would see the products of the East and the West now daily interchanged from Wilmington, Morehead City and Nag's Head in the East, to the Cherokee and Tennessee line in the West.

People may well differ as to the authors of this great North Carolina Railroad measure; but to one fact all assent: Had it not been for the casting vote of Calvin Graves, we would probably be "Old Rip" still.

And now I predict: That in ten years she will be the Empire State of the South Atlantic slope





